

## **Testimony to the Appropriations Committee In Support of Funding for Early Childhood Programs**

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Submitted by Tracey Madden-Hennessey  
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Good evening Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Tracey Madden-Hennessey, Associate Director at the YWCA New Britain and I am here to speak in support of funding for Community Plans, Early Education and After School. My organization is one of the larger childcare programs in New Britain serving more than 350 children, infant-after school providing early education and after school programming, both to support children academically, and to support parents so they can work.

I am here to speak in support of The Care 4 Kids Program for low income families. The Governor's budget plans to maintain closure of the subsidy program to new families for 2 years. This is an economic development program. In cities like New Britain, where a significant percentage of children live in poverty, many parents rely on Care 4 Kids so they can work. With so many of our local families headed by single women, lack of access to childcare assistance disproportionately impacts women and their ability to support their families. Many are unable to work as they are unable to afford the cost of childcare.

About 158 children, more than 40% of the children who participate in the YWCA's collective programs receive assistance through Care 4 Kids in order to participate. In 2015, subsidies in our preschool program alone totaled more than \$350,000 for the year. It was an enormous source of support for families in our program, but it is also an enormous source of support for our agency. School Readiness specifically was created to rely on a braided stream of funding that included the state grant, parent fees based on a sliding scale, and Care 4 Kids for those eligible. Loss of a significant portion of this funding stream is impossible to absorb. Make no mistake about this, as parents using Care 4 Kids transition their children out of a program, to be replaced by families who are not eligible for subsidy support, this is a loss of funding.

The impact of the original proposed plan to end vouchers will ripple through our industry and the Connecticut economy quickly as hundreds of families cannot access subsidies. It will disproportionately hurt women trying to re-enter the workforce after having a baby. Infant/Toddler care across the state is a problem. It's expensive and in limited supply. In New Britain, only 7 out of every 100 infants/toddlers can access childcare. Without subsidies, low income women will likely turn to unregulated care which is unmonitored and places children at great risk. Some women, if care is not available, will turn to other state assistance programs, simply exchanging one state funding stream for another, which generates no economic benefits for the state.

Of equal concern, are cuts to School Readiness funding which will eliminate preschool slots. New Britain uses all of its slots and runs waiting lists in most programs. It requires all of New Britain's current school

readiness slots for the percentage of children entering kindergarten with preschool experience to remain at parity with the rest of the state. The positive impact on preschool for low income children is well documented. It supports brain development at a time when the foundation for learning is being established. In a community like New Britain, where so many children are not reading on grade level, a quality preschool experience is essential. Attempts to roll-back the number who can access it, will instead increase the number of children who are behind entering the K-12 school system and set up the need for more interventions, increasing costs elsewhere.

In New Britain, one of our local Foundations documented that only 1:10 school age students had access to programming after school. Although that number has improved, rolling back C4K subsidies rolls back that progress and increases the likelihood many young children leave school for empty homes. This is in addition to greatly reducing funding for after school grants and rolling funding together with other programming like Family Resource Centers and Youth Service Bureaus. This increases children's exposure to risk and undermines our community efforts to improve student outcomes.

Finally, I would like to speak in support of the Community Planning Funding eliminated from the Office of Early Childhood. This funding is very small in comparison to so many other line items in the state budget. However, it has been leveraged to great effectiveness in communities across the state. In New Britain, it supports our Coalition for New Britain's Youth. The collaborative work of the Coalition has been lauded locally, statewide, and nationally. In 2016, The Coalition work addressing summer learning loss and chronic absenteeism were the focus of the city's application for an All-America City Award through the National Civic League. This award specifically has fueled other funding awards-Innovation Places, and Working Cities Challenge dollars specifically, that could spur hundreds of thousands of additional development dollars. In addition, the city's summer school initiative, a partnership of the Coalition and the School District, was a recipient of the New York Life Summer Innovation Award in 2016. We anticipate this award to have a similar impact on summer learning expansion as the AAC award has had on economic development. For a small investment, the state is supporting communities working creatively at the local level to address their specific needs. For some, loss of this grant will put this innovative approach to community problem-solving to an end.

The combination of steps being contemplated to cut the Connecticut budget will have a significant and disproportionate impact on low income families. But it can have a significant negative impact on the economy. Loss of childcare programs could negatively impact several employment sectors who rely heavily on these workers. The parents using Care 4 Kids subsidies in my program are clustered in several industries-healthcare, retail and restaurants, as well as, in non-profits and light manufacturing. It is not difficult to imagine that this is true across the state. Employers relying on this workforce may find it difficult to retain employees who can't find or maintain their childcare.

Early childhood is itself a significant industry in Connecticut employing more than 14400 individuals statewide according to the Early Childhood Workforce Index 2016. Our childcare programs employ 68 individuals full and part time working with children and families. There are others working in supportive functions. Many staff across the industry, including my own, will be impacted if funding losses force us and School Readiness Programs like ours to make cuts.

Your consideration of all of these factors, when making decisions to cut the budget, is appreciated.